Digital backpack book

This article was downloaded by: [University of Cincinnati Libraries]

On: 17 April 2012, At: 19:30

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:

1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street,

London W1T 3JH, UK

Journal of Curriculum

Studies

Publication details, including instructions for

authors and subscription information:

http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tcus20

Did we hear you ?: Issues of

student voice in a curriculum

innovation

Ross Brooker & Doune Macdonald

Available online: 08 Nov 2010

To cite this article: Ross Brooker & Doune Macdonald (1999): Did we hear you ?:

Issues of student voice in a curriculum innovation, Journal of Curriculum Studies,

31:1, 83-97

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/002202799183313

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/

terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study

purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution,

reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any

form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any

representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to

date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should

be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not

be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or

damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in

connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Did we hear you?: issues of student voice in a

curriculum innovation

ROSS BROOKER and DOUNE MACDONALD

The call for student `voice’ to be `heard’, already part of several discourses in

educational research, has now become an issue in physical education research in such

topics as teacher± student interactions, dropout, equity, skill development, assessment

and constructivist perspectives on teaching/learning strategies. However, little attention

in either themainstreamor physical education literature has been paid to student

`voice’ in curriculum making at the syllabus level. This paper, drawing on poststructuralist

and feminist analyses, provides a critique of how student `voice’ has been

positioned in curriculum innovation, drawing on an evaluation of a senior secondary

school subject in Australia.

Whether students have an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to

centrally developed school curricula is a question that deserves close

study. Most often in curriculum-making practices in Western schools

student voices have generally beenmarginalized. At best, learners’ opinions

are sought only after signi® cant decisions (e.g. the selection of legitimate

content) have already been made and the curriculum has been determined

by o. cially approved persons (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993). This omission,

Mac an Ghaill (1992: 229) suggests, `is symptomatic of the wider

political context . . . in which education initiatives are primarily concerned

with the quantitative world of the technology of change rather [than] the

qualitative world of values’. Although students are considered central to

schooling, they are rarely consulted in curriculummaking (Dyson 1995). If

learner input is sought at all during curriculummaking, it may be solicited

during the trial, or pilot, stage.

As in mostWestern education systems, in Australia curriculum frameworks

for senior secondary schooling are ® rst developed at central sites by

people deemed by education authorities to have relevant expertise (usually

teachers, bureaucrats, university educators, employers and, in some cases,

business interests). These chosen experts in this `development arena’

(Common and Egan 1988: 3) are required to balance the competing

j. curriculum studies, 1999, vol. 31, no. 1, 83± 97

Ross Brooker is a lecturer in physical education pedagogy and curriculum in the School of

Human Movement Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road,

Kelvin Grove 4059, Queensland, Australia. His current research interests include the social

construction of physical education as a subject in school contexts and approaches to student

learning in physical education.

Doune Macdonald is a senior lecturer in physical education curriculum and pedagogy in the

Department of HumanMovement Studies, The University of Queensland, St Lucia 4072,

Queensland, Australia. Her research interests include curriculuminnovation, teachers’ work

and teacher socialization.

0022± 0272/99 $12´00 Ñ 1999 Taylor & Francis Ltd

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

discourses of various stakeholders, of whom students may be one group.

These discourses, which constitute a covert agenda in curriculum development,

are implicitly arranged into a hierarchy of in¯ uences based on

power relationships among stakeholders `who often appear symbiotically to

reproduce a positivist-based, technicist approach [to curriculum making]

that is overly preoccupied with the ``how’’ rather than the ``why’’ of

curriculum change’ (Mac an Ghaill 1992: 229).

Curriculum making is thus informed by many discourses that exert

various degrees of in¯ uence. Some powerful discourses are derived from

socio-historical traditions of worthwhile knowledge (e.g. what is considered

important to know) and from notions of e. ective school structures (e.g.

timetabling). At another level, decisions about the formand shape of a new

curriculum are informed by legislative requirements for certifying outcomes

and credentialling students, system-wide requirements for structuring

a curriculum, standards expected of a subject for each level of

schooling, and contemporary research in each discipline. Curriculum

frameworks typically identify general objectives/outcomes, content and

skills to be covered, and assessment requirements.

The legitimation of curriculumknowledge embodied in a framework is

undertaken by schools, in some cases by means of a formal trial. In

Queensland, Australia, the setting for this study, a formal trial lasts up to

four years, during which time a new curriculum is evaluated using data

collected from relevant stakeholders in schools (primarily heads of department,

teachers and administrators, and to a lesser extent students and

parents) and other interested parties. Upon successful completion of a trial,

a curriculum framework is approved for general implementation by the

central authority and passed down to all schools within the authority’s

jurisdiction. Although each school is required to remain within the framework’s

boundaries, it has `freedom’ to interpret a curriculum in its own

setting. At the school level, curricular decisions are usually made by

persons responsible for a particular subject (discipline) on the basis of

such factors as teacher expertise, availability of facilities and resources, and,

less so, perceived needs of the learners.

This linear and structured curriculum making, although informed by

many agendas, deliberately favours the voices of some stakeholders.

Although these stakeholders believe they are acting in the best interests

of learners, one can rightly ask `whose interests are being served and whose

interests are excluded’ (Cherryholmes 1987: 311). While the curriculum

supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if

sought at all, are marginalized and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum

making. This marginalization of student voice is of particular

concern in such subjects as physical education[PE] in which the essence of

the subject is closely linked to the interests and culture of learners.

But what does legitimate student `voice’ sound like? Britzman (1989:

146) suggests that the concept of voice has several meanings, including the

literal (representing speech and the perspectives of the speaker), metaphorical

(the manner and qualities of the speaker’s words), and political (a

commitment to the right to speak and be represented). Within the political

arena there are three overlapping perspectives: liberal humanist (giving

84 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

individuals the right to speak), critical, and feminist (concerned with

changing societal power relations), and post-structuralist (questioning the

need to speak at all and heralding the multiplicity of voices). In this study,

`post-structuralism’ connotes educational theory that draws on such postmodernist

notions as diversity and globalization and uses discourse analysis

as a way of understanding how social relationships and patterns are

regulated and controlled. Against this background, we explore the notion

of student voice in curriculum making through a re¯ ective critique of a

traditional curriculum development project after it was completed. The

project consisted of an evaluation of a new senior secondary school subject,

and the evaluation procedure was tightly prescribed by the central authority.

On the basis of hindsight, therefore, we raise issues about how student

voice was positioned during the project, and o. er suggestions for enabling

students in the future to contribute in a more meaningful way to curriculum

making.

Perspectives on student voice

At the systemic, school and subject level, the curriculum has tended to be

something `planned for’ and `done to’ students (Klein 1989: 90). Erickson

and Schultz (1992: 481) claim that the `systematic silencing of the student

voice’ is consistent with traditional authority structures in schools and a

consequence of methodological preferences for positivistic research techniques

in formulating and implementing such procedures as those followed

in this case. Their criticism can be understood by examining how di. erent

research paradigms (liberal, critical, feminist and post-structuralist) have

considered student voice.

Within a liberal framework, the student-experienced curriculum has

been examined in two ways: `® rst by studying student attitudes regarding

particular school subjects and second by studying student subject matter

conceptualizations’ (Pissanos and Allison 1993: 425). It is the former that

dominates PE research. For example, when in 1995 a special edition of the

Journal of Teaching in Physical Education was devoted to student voice, the

editor stated (Graham 1995a: 364) that its purpose was `to describe and

analyse what students think, feel, and know about various aspects of their

physical education programs’. Graham (1995a: 365) asked questions about

the `kinds of things’ teachers can learn fromstudents about what they teach

and how they teach that can `inform, and perhaps even change, the way

teachers design and deliver’ their programmes. By asking such questions,

the focus was on how children viewed their programmes rather than how

they contributed to the construction of those programmes. The contents of

Graham’s monograph included studies of students’ perspectives of curriculum

innovations (e.g. Dyson 1995), authentic assessment procedures

(e.g. Veal and Compagnone 1995), and student attitudes and alienation

(e.g. Carlson 1995).

In recent general educational literature, researchers studying student

voice have examined how youth alienation may be ameliorated within the

school curriculum (e.g. Cumming 1994, Edwards 1994, Queensland Board

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 85

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

of Teacher Registration 1996). The Queensland Board of Teacher

Registration (1996) produced a collaborative document recommending

that curriculum initiatives should include recognition of the traits of

young adolescents, negotiated pedagogical practices and learning experiences,

varied and ¯ exible pathways, enjoyable and meaningful content, and

¯ exible assessment, evaluation and reporting procedures. In recognizing

the potential disjunction between this rhetoric and student-centred

curricula, Cumming (1994: 42) recommends `authentic student participation’

which `means nothing less than all young adolescents assuming a

proactive role in the planning, implementing and evaluating of their own

learning’.

The liberal notion of authentic student participation in planning,

implementing and evaluating has implications for curriculum design. In

recommending `signi® cant student involvement and the valuing of student

questions, input, and re¯ ections’ in curriculum making, Edwards (1994:

52) not only supports an approach to education that focuses on students’

concerns in all phases of design and implementation, but also recommends

that the curriculum be negotiated with and be relevant to students,

structured around primary concepts, assessed in line with students’ learning,

and adapted tostudents’ progress. Advocates of such approaches in PE

o. er similar arguments, and report that `a focus on the student perspective

largely has been absent in curricular practice’ (Pissanos and Allison 1993:

425).The extent to which the above-mentioned approaches genuinely

involve the students in curriculum construction has been queried.

Although questions such as `What do my students think about various

aspects of my physical education programs?’ (Graham 1995b: 479) are

important at one level, they do not challenge current practices in listening

tostudent voice in curriculummaking, teaching and learning. Smith (1989:

34) is concerned that the mere fact of listening to student voice often

remains an end in itself ± `a celebration after which we return to the

everyday’. Those liberal interventions for student voice that frequently

result in the reproduction of the everyday have been criticized by those

critical and feminist scholars who maintain that liberal traditions fail not

only to capture a range of student voice (e.g. from lower socio-economic

groups, girls and ethnic minorities) but also to stimulate a challenge to

hegemonic structures (e.g. sexism and racism) in schooling (Erickson and

Schultz 1992, Evans and Davies 1993).

In the critical tradition, Giroux (1990: 49± 50) concludes that the

discourse of curriculum theory at its best:

should embody a public philosophy dedicated to returning schools to their

primary task . . . creating a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise

power over their own lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge

production and acquisition.

In other words, educators need a theory of curriculum that alerts them to

howschooling renders some students voiceless, howteachers are reduced to

86 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

technicians, and how particular forms of authority subvert the ethical force

of educational leadership and learning.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1993: 9) propose a theory of resistance, `a

dialectical notion of human agency that rightly portrays domination as a

process that is neither static or complete’, as an entry into a form of

curriculum making that recognizes the complexity of class and power

structures. With respect to student voice, they suggest that `it is on the

terrains of a class and popular culture that students primarily develop an

active voice’ (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993: 128). Thus, within this radical

discourse, curriculum should be founded on the culture, knowledge and

classroom social practices `that validate the experiences . . . students bring

to schools. This means con® rming such experiences so as to give students

an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally attempt to silence

themby ignoring their cultural capital’ (Aronowitz andGiroux 1993: 151).

In addition, Morrison (1996: 5) advocates a co-operative and collaborative

approach in which teachers `work on the experiences that children bring to

school, interrogate themcritically, . . . so that children’s life experiences are

transformed into critical awareness and empowerment’.

PE has its own critical and feminist tradition, albeit limited, in relation

to student voice. Various socially critical agendas in PE research, Rovengo

and Kirk (1995) note, have focused on students and their opportunities (or

lack thereof) to learn. For example, the contributing authors in Evans’

(1993) text on equity in PE contend that the current PE curriculumis classand

gender-biased and privilegesmotor- and academic-Âelite students. They

also demonstrate the hegemony of middle-class and patriarchal values in a

curriculum that serves some students more successfully than others.

Student responses to studies of di. erences in gender, race, ability (academic

and physical), lifestyle and body shape are largely based on problems

de® ned by the researchers’ agendas (e.g. Hellison and Templin 1991, Evans

1993, Kirk and Tinning 1994). But feminists seeking change beyond

merely equal opportunity for girls and women have examined the constraints

of dominant sexualities, patterns of communication and harassment,

content selection in line withmasculine traditions, and the impact of

media images on girls’ and womens’ well-being and self-esteem (e.g.

Vertinsky 1992, Kirk andWright 1995, Wright 1996).

In turn, many critical and feminist arguments surrounding voice have

been subjected to scrutiny from post-structuralist perspectives on power

(e.g. Ellsworth 1992, Gore 1992, Orner 1992, White 1994). These perspectives

raise such questions as why must students speak? For whose

bene® t? What use will be made of the speech after it is heard? Who gives

voice to whom? Is it safe for students to speak? Can the outcomes be

liberatory? (Gore 1992, Orner 1992). Underpinning these questions are

challenges to the dualistic acceptance of `teacher’ and `student’ and to the

assumption that `educators stand above their students and guide them in

their struggle for ``personal empowerment’’ and ``voice’’’ (Orner 1992: 87).

Gore (1992: 57), however, cautions researchers that these critical perspectives

over-optimistically `attribute extraordinary abilities to the teacher’

with little cognizance of either the teacher’s context or power to put into

e. ect desired changes.

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 87

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

Furthermore, Bates (1994) maintains that students’ chaotic lifestyles

and learning environments undermine the authenticity of their voices in

what is idealized as linear curriculum making. Foucaultian theory suggests

that power forms, rather than being linear (e.g. teachers giving power tothe

students), are pervasive and complex. Thus Orner (1992: 83) advises

educators to `discard monarchical conceptions of power and shift focus to

notions of power as productive and present in all contexts, regulating all

discourses and social interactions’. Unless they do so, student voice is

unlikely to inform curriculum making in particular instances in any

thoughtful way.

As the postmodern condition includes a proliferation of communication

methods accessed individually but shared globally, a study of student voice

needs to take account of those new (learning) technologies changing the

means of knowledge production and distribution (Hinkson 1992, Evans and

Davies 1993, Rovengo and Kirk 1995). Children possessing skills derived

from their interactions with technology and media, White (1994: 87)

contends, have a `new orientation to the world’ in which new relations

are possible. As a consequence of new electronic communication, White

claims, schools should reduce their reliance on print and rethink their

conceptions of teacher authority. Given the pervasive in¯ uence of the

media, Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992) maintain, postmodern youth now

label school PE as boring. It is essential that physical educators not only

take account of students’ shifting understandings of physical activity,

lifestyle and the body, but also adopt teaching approaches that heighten

students’ critical capacities and foreground `individual sensitivity . . . which

is supportive, nurturing and accepting’ (Tinning 1994: 84).

Post-structuralist analyses have also drawn attention to the complexity

of multilayered and contextually re¯ ective identity. What might this

complexity mean for acting or representing the `real me’ (Giddens 1991,

Ellsworth 1992, McRobbie 1994)? As Orner (1992: 86) states: `When

Anglo-American feminist and critical pedagogues call for students to ® nd

and articulate their voice, they presume singular, essential, authentic, and

stable notions of identity’. Although those researchers are also said to

presume an equality of voice, `all voices within the classroom are not and

cannot carry equal legitimacy, safety, and power in dialogue at this

historical moment’ (Ellsworth 1992: 108). Nor can it be assumed, given

themediating e. ect of language, that the voice of another is transparent and

can be interpreted `correctly’ (Orner 1992). Therefore, according to poststructuralist

critique, the notion of securing and understanding all

students’ consistent voices across time and contexts is ¯ awed.

Across several research traditions (liberal, critical, feminist and poststructuralist),

the issue of student voice has been a concern in both

education and PE literature. Emphases within that literature have varied

according to the kind of the information sought from the students, the

means by which students might have input, the breadth of voices that are

`heard’, the proposed outcomes of seeking student voice, and the con® dence

of teachers or researchers that voice may indeed be `heard’. It is interesting

to note that despite movement being the key medium for expression in

PE, `voice’ has always been positioned as oral communication. There

88 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

is, however, across the traditions, little criticism and few empirical data

that attend to student voice within curriculum making. Rather, the

emphases have been on the more passive role of student experience and

response.

Method

The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies [BSSSS] PE syllabus was

in the ® rst two years (1994± 1995) of a four-year trial in 11 Queensland

schools at the time of our data collection. As BSSSS appointed evaluators

of the trial period, in our data collection we were expected to follow

particular research practices prescribed by BSSSS. The 11 schools had

expressed an interest toBSSSS in joining the trial. Over the two years, the

trial involved 27 teachers (21%female) and 822 students (39%male) in

years 11 and 12 (post-compulsory schooling). We collected qualitative data

through audiotaped interviews with key stakeholders, and recorded ® eld

notes during the two to four visits to each trial school over the two-year

period and at teachers’ meetings. We interviewed 27 trial teachers twice for

at least one hour. We also interviewed 10 to 15 students per school,

balanced by gender and achievement levels, in each year of the trial in

small groups for approximately one hour, and it is these interviews that

provide the principal focus of this case study. We examined the syllabus

document in terms of its `internal consistency and interpretability, relevance

and meaning to teachers and students, suitability of its breadth,

depth and subject matter, appropriateness of assessment requirements and

standards, and the e. cacy of its theoretical frameworks’ , as directed by the

guidelines to evaluators (Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1992:

12).

Although our data analysis proceeded in accordance with questions

included in the brief to evaluators, it also re¯ ected a grounded approach in

which investigation followed the concerns of stakeholders (Glaser and

Strauss 1967, Cohen and Manion 1989). After interview data were transcribed,

they were analysed to determine emerging themes and issues. This

analysis was assessed, clari® ed and supplemented by reference to ® eld

notes. Because data were collected from several sources and from each

school, we were able to triangulate our ® ndings to establish trustworthiness.

The evaluators’ taskwas toformulate, on the basis of the data, a set of

recommendations to BSSSS for ongoing syllabus re® nement.

Although not the primary focus for this paper, quantitative data were

also collected from students in the ® rst year (n 481) and the second year

(Year 11 students, n 341; Year 12 students, n 327) of the trial. Surveys

were used to monitor the demography of the trial cohorts, together with

their motivations (e.g. `Why did you choose to study PE?’), satisfaction

(e.g. `What aspects of PE doyou like and dislike?’) and perceived outcomes

(e.g. `What do you hope to gain fromstudying PE?’) of working in the new

subject.

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 89

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

Data and discussion

We were confronted by three signi® cant problems. The ® rst was how to

structure our discussion. The second, amore weighty problem, was how to

position the voices of students from the study in that discussion to avoid

providing another example of the di. culties that have characterized

previous research into student voice in curriculum making. The third

problem was how we should position ourselves, as both researchers and

authors, in the discussion. In response to these problems, we have organized

our discussion around three interrelated questions arising from a

review of related literature, and where appropriate, within the framework

of those questions, identi® ed the voice of the students and of the researchers.

Our voices as authors will also be identi® ed.

The three questions that provided our framework were:

. How was student voice positioned?

. Why should students have spoken?

. What were the outcomes from what the students said?

How was student voice positioned?

The positioning of student voice in the evaluation was framed by several

intersecting factors: existing protocols for such evaluations, researchers’

(re)interpretations of those protocols, guidelines given toteachers about the

characteristics of the students to be interviewed, students chosen by the

teachers for interview, interviewprotocols, conduct of the interviews by the

researchers, and interview questions.

The protocols for evaluating new school subjects clearly place teachers

at the centre. The handbook of procedures for the development of new

subjects, provided by the statutory authority, stated that the major purpose

of evaluating the trial of a new subject (in this case, PE) was `to assist the

subject advisory committee [i.e. the body responsible for the oversight of

syllabus development] to develop a syllabus that communicates its educational

proposals in such a way that teachers can prepare e. ective work

programs with con® dence and e. ciency’ (Board of Senior Secondary

School Studies 1992: 12). This purpose was further de® ned as being `to

disclose the needs of teachers’ (p. 15). The handbook, however, also

suggested that in the evaluation `the relevance of the subject to students’

should be emphasized, and that `sources of information’ should `include’

students (p. 12).

Although the evaluators in the PE trial `included’ students in the data

gathering, the emphasis (in terms of quality and quantity) was placed on

the teachers. For example, teachers were interviewed by the evaluators on

multiple occasions, mostly individually, with the questions provided

beforehand. In contrast, students were interviewed on two occasions in

groups, with noprior knowledge of the questions. Although student groups

were mixed in ability and gender, it could not be said that the interviews

su. ciently captured the range of student voice nor did they provide

90 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

opportunity for student voice to carry `equal legitimacy’ (Ellsworth 1992:

108). In so doing, the voice of individual students was e. ectively subjugated

and that of the group privileged ± in responses that cannot be

interpreted `correctly’, given the mediating aspects of language (Orner

1992).

In analysing the evaluation in relation to the students, the framing of

the interview questions (as seen in table 1) constituted an important context

for positioning student voice. These questions tended to elicit super® cial

reactions to the implementation of a new subject rather than to a. ord

students an opportunity to inform curriculum making at a level (Macan

Ghaill 1992) that re¯ ected the social and cultural capital of young adults.

An examination of the interview questions suggests that students’ voices

were positioned by the questions in two ways. First, the nature of the

questions asked provided a boundary for those voices. The depth and focus

of responses were limited by the content of the questions (e.g. questions 1,

2, 7, 11, 12). Second, the level of response from students may have been

mediated by the language used in the framing of the questions (e.g.

questions 9, 10).

The evaluators’ role in positioning student voice in the evaluation

deserves critical comment. Although we were committed to the production

of student voice in the evaluation, and our e. orts were consistent with the

expectations of the curriculum authority, at another level there were

opportunities to position that voice within a more post-structuralist

frame. For example, we could have captured (and reported) voices of

individual students (Ellsworth 1992) in greater numbers and on a voluntary

basis. Students could have hadmore open access tothe evaluation, with the

timing and nature of their responses being determined by themrather than

by the evaluators’ interview schedules and data-collection timetables. The

extent to which this input would have been valued in curriculum making,

however, is open to question because of the institutionalized traditions and

expectations that framed the evaluation.

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 91

Table 1. Que stions posed to groups of students in the second year of the trial.

1. What did you learn, in general terms, about PE last year?

2. Did you enjoy PE last year ± are you enjoying so far this year?

3. What Level of Achievement did you get at end of the Year 11?

4. What were you happy with that Level of Achievement ± did it re¯ ect your ability?

5. What was positive/negative about PE last year?

6. How did the subject change as the year progressed in terms of: teachers; the way you

learnt; what you learnt; assessment?

7. Is PE the same so far this year as last year?

8. Do you understand the content for assessment?

9. Do you know how your Exit Level of Achievement is going to be worked out as the end

of this year?

10. Describe yourself, generally, in terms of academic ability and physical skills?

11. How does PE compare to other subjects?

12. Would any of you like to drop out or wish you’d chosen another subject?

13. How do you feel about being videoed for assessment?

14. How would you change the course?

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

Why should students have spoken?

With the bene® t of both hindsight and of post-evaluation reading and

re¯ ection on our own research practices, we have reconsidered the potential

for authentic student involvement. A post-evaluation re-examination of the

data collected from students in the course of the evaluation, made it clear

that the student voice could have informed the development of the subject

in ways that other stakeholders could not.

Students’ comments about physical activities that were the focus of

study, and about class participation, allude to issues related to the curriculum

and youth culture:

They gave us a book and it had all our subjects in it andwas supposed to give

an outline of what was in each subject . . . it said all these things that we had a

choice . . . in one term we could choose between canoeing, abseiling, rock

climbing . . . all these di. erent things. Then we got to this year and we were

just told . . . ® rst term you’re doing golf, second term you’re doing netball,

third term you’re doing athletics.

Because the majority of the class hasn’t done the practical that we are doing,

everybody starts at the same level. Nobody is better than anyone. Sowe’ re all

working together and helping each other.

Their comments aboutwhocould achieve success in PE remind curriculum

makers of the importance of developing a school subject that provides

opportunities and learning experiences for students with a wide range of

abilities:

There is a lot of guys [sic] who are good in this particular area so for them to

do well at the subject it’s important. They might not be as academically

smart as others but they can dowell in this area. Sofor themit’s an important

subject.

The practical side is good . . . it gives everyone a fair chance.

The identi® cation by students about what was being learned provided

insights about the relationship between the actual and intended student

outcomes from PE:

To listen to other peoples’ opinion . . . not to be biased and sexist. Treat

everyone as equal.

You know how to improve yourself.

I’ve started to relate more about the energy systems in the actual play with

our ® tness and how long it takes to recover.

The theory’s good because it’s . . . relevant towhat you need in sport, like the

way you think.

The comments made by students about assessment illustrate what students

o. ered to the PE curriculum:

You have to do well in the assignments as well as performing well in the

practical. They [students] have to understand the sport to associate the

theory with the sport.

92 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

I think there’s a bit more pressure on the actual work we’re doing because a

lot of the workwe are being assessed on [is work] that we’re doing in class . . .

just getting assessed all the time.

We had a round-robin competition in class. . . . Mr L. went around and

watched games of each person and assessed how they make their judgement

and how they play their shots. I think it was a little hard to assess how people

played really because some days you might have an o. day.

The question of what students can contribute toPE curriculummaking

is of particular signi® cance because of the inextricable link between youth

culture and PE in schools (Tinning and Fitzclarence 1992). The physical

activities around which the PE curriculum is organized are those which

students undertake in their sport and recreation outside school. Only by

accessing student voice can the implications of these connections for

teaching and learning be understood and incorporated into a curriculum.

Although student voices have the potential to make a unique contribution

to curriculum making, the question of how to position those voices to

ensure that they are heard remains unclear. There are issues of power and

student choice to be considered (e.g. Ellsworth 1992, Gore 1992, Orner

1992).

But should students have been given the option of whether or not to

respond? As important stakeholders it was traditional practice in an

evaluation that students be given an opportunity to contribute their

opinions. But in this case the question of giving students the option of

whether to participate or not was not raised. Those students selected by

teachers to participate in group interviews as representatives of all voices in

their class had noright of refusal. Although this `coercion’ may be analyzed

as part of data interpretation, the power relationships between evaluators

and students through the intermediary action of teachers remain a serious

issue. Did we as evaluators exercise illegitimate power over students by

failing to o. er theman opportunity towithhold their voice and the right to

remain silent rather than being required to act in some way as representatives

of their class group or sub-groups?

What were the outcomes from what the students said?

At one level, as it has been suggested, most student comments focused on

implementation of the PE programme, and anecdotal evidence suggested

that such comments proved helpful to teachers in rethinking pedagogical

practices (Graham 1995a). A further outcome was the reproduction of

students’ comments in formal evaluation reports (Macdonald et al. 1995).

The positioning of these voices in formal reports is, however, worthy of

comment.

Student data in the formal reports were a distilled version of what the

students had said in the course of the evaluation, and individual voices were

subsumed into a single reporting `voice’. There was no alternative for this

procedure, because students’ views were gathered from group conversations

and the identity of individual respondents was not recorded. As a

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 93

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

result, student voices were `homogenized’ because they were reported as a

single entity, free of any socio-historical and contextual recognition (Ellsworth

1992, Orner 1992). For example, at the end of the trial we

(Macdonald et al. 1995: ii) reported that:

students . . . had enjoyed the subject, particularly those who were satis® ed

with their Exit Levels of Achievement. Those students who did not feel as

though they had achieved in the subject and/or those who did not enjoy the

subject had struggled with: working as independent learners; the selection of

physical activities o. ered in their school’s program; and making links

between learning `in’ and `about’ physical activity.

From a position of power (Gore 1992, Orner 1992), it may be argued, we

usurped the voices of students and failed to `appreciate the theoretical fact

that only those directly concerned can speakin a practical way on their own

behalf’ (Foucault 1980).

A further point to note is the incongruence between the qualitative

nature of the data collected from students and the quantitative way in

which part of it was reported:

As with the teacher, students’ re¯ ections about Physical Education as a

course of study weremostly positive (81%). Students who have achieved have

enjoyed their involvement in the subject and have certainly indicated that

they have learned signi® cantly. However, some students’ comments (26%)

expressed concern that there was a need for greater variety in the physical

activities. (Macdonald et al. 1995: iii)

Although reporting student (and other) data in this manner was

expected by the sponsoring authority, such an approach limited students’

`power in dialogue’ (Ellsworth 1992: 108) and reduced the level of

sophistication of their input into the evaluation. Consequently, the production

of student voices became an end in itself (Smith 1989), thereby leaving

unansweredGore’s (1992) andOrner’s (1992) post-structuralist questions ±

whogives voices towhom? For whose bene® t?What use will bemade of the

speech after it is heard?

Conclusion

Through a re¯ ective critique of a PE curriculum development project, we

have explored issues related to the inclusion of student voice in curriculum

making. We have examined the unique way in which students’ voices were

positioned as a result of the traditions implicit in systemic subject evaluations

and the interpretation of that tradition into evaluation practice. The

framing of questions, the selection of particular `voices’ for interview and

the construction of power relationships between the interviewer and interviewee

through the interview protocols, were instrumental in de® ning the

boundaries of student voice in the evaluation. From another perspective,

these various discourses alsoserved as `® lters’ throughwhich student voices

were regulated and sanitized. Consequently, the evaluation accessed

student views about the delivery of PE programmes simply at a classroom

94 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

level rather than at a depth that would have contributed tothe construction

of the syllabus (Cumming 1994).

If relevant and meaningful curriculum o. erings are to be made to

students, then it is appropriate to move beyond the question of why

students must speak to consider how `students’ engagement in the construction

of their own schooling experiences’ might be made more explicit

(Grundy 1988: 91). The challenge is to embrace curriculum-making

practices that are more inclusive and valuing of student voice. Such a

shift to position curriculum making in a contested (concerned about the

`why’) rather than positivistic (concerned about the `how’) framework,

requires policies and practices underpinned by commitments tothe right of

students to speak and be represented, and to a faithful representation of

their speech and perspectives (Britzman 1989). This task of ensuring

student contribution tocurriculummakingmay be accomplished in various

ways not included in liberal and critical notions of authenticity.

At one level, the authorities responsible for the curriculum development

could add student representatives to curriculum-making committees.

Students in the trial schools could have elected representatives to these

committees. This initiative in itself, however, is inadequate. The meetings

could be structured toensure student voices are considered and held at sites

that o. er more familiar surroundings to students. At this level, the central

authority’s expectations could be reformulated to promote practices that

`give students an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally

attempt to silence them by ignoring their cultural capital’ (Giroux 1990:

151). These practicesmust be structured and enacted in ways that promote

the gathering and reporting of student voice rather than perpetuating the

assumption that `educators stand above their students, and guide them in

their struggle for ``personal empowerment’’ and ``voice’’’ (Orner 1992: 87).

Students could conduct peer interviews or provide responses that were not

structured by interview schedules or speci® c data-collection timetables.

Such recommendations are intended neither to romanticize student voices

nor to give them unwarranted authenticity, but rather to acknowledge the

validity of those and other voices in curriculum making (Carter 1993,

Hargreaves 1996).

At yet another level, the practices designed to `hear’ and report student

voice need rethinking. To position their voices meaningfully in curriculum

making, individual students could act as volunteer `cases’ whose experiences

of a new curriculum could be tracked throughout the period of the

evaluation. The perspectives of these students, together with relevant

elements of their biographies, could be included in the evaluation reports

as individual case studies. By so doing, the diversity of student reaction toa

curriculum could be used to inform curriculum design. Nevertheless,

although such actions could help to overcome the production of student

voice as an end in itself `after which we return to the everyday’ (Smith

1989: 34), the issue of capturing a breadth of representation of student

voice remains di. cult.

These suggestions call for new ways of conceptualizing curriculum

making and new sensitivities to the value of student contributions to that

task. They require a commitment on the part of curriculum-making

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 95

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

authorities both to challenge the dualistic acceptance of `educator’ and

`student’ and alsotoreorganize power relations toensure that student voice

informs curriculum making. The inclusion of students `might serve to

enable them to overcome the institutional barriers that operate against an

emancipatory view of students as active curriculummakers’ (Mac anGhaill

1992: 231).

References

ARONOWITZ, S. andGIROUX, H. A. (1993) Education Still Under Siege, 2nd edn (Westport,

CN: Bergin and Garvey).

BATES, R. (1994) Introduction. In Deakin Centre for Education and Change, Schooling

What Future?: Balancing theEducation Agenda (Geelong, Victoria: DeakinCentre for

Education and Change), 1± 5.

BOARD OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDIES (1992) The Development and Approval of

Syllabuses for Board Subjects (Brisbane, Queensland: Board of Senior Secondary

School Studies).

BRITZMAN, D. P. (1989) Who has the ¯ oor? curriculum, teaching, and the English student

teacher’s struggle for voice. Curriculum Inquiry, 19 (2), 143± 162.

CARLSON, T. B. (1995)We hate gym: student alienation fromphysical education. Journal of

Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 467± 477.

CARTER, K. (1993) The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education.

Educational Researcher, 22 (1), 5± 12, 18.

CHERRYHOLMES, C. H. (1987) A social project for curriculum: post-structural perspectives.

Journal of Curriculum Studies, 19 (4), 295± 316.

COHEN, L. and MANION, L. (1989) Research Methods in Education, 3rd edn (London:

Routledge).

COMMON, D. L. and EGAN, K. (1988) The missing soul of models of curriculum

implementation-educational theory. Curriculum Perspectives, 8 (1), 1± 10.

CUMMING, J. (1994) Educating young adolescents: targets and strategies for the 1990s.

Curriculum Perspectives, 14 (3), 41± 44.

DYSON, B. P. (1995) Students’ voices in two alternative elementary physical education

programs. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 394± 407.

EDWARDS, B. (1994) Constructivist education and middle level curriculum. Curriculum

Perspectives, 14 (3), 52± 55.

ELLSWORTH, E. (1992) Why doesn’t this feel empowering? working through the repressive

myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke and J. Gore (eds), Feminisms and Critical

Pedagogy (New York: Routledge), 90± 119.

ERICKSON, F. and SCHULTZ, J. (1992) Students’ experience of the curriculum. In P. W.

Jackson (ed.), Handbook of Research on Curriculum (New York, Macmillan), 465± 485.

EVANS, J. (ed.) (1993) Equality, Education and Physical Education (London: Falmer Press).

EVANS, J. andDAVIES, B. (1993) Post-script: physical education post ERA, in a postmodern

society. In J. Evans (ed.), Equality, Education and Physical Education (London:

Falmer Press), 233± 238.

FOUCAULT,M. (1980) Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972± 1977,

ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham and K. Soper (London:

Harvester).

GIDDENS, A. (1991) Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age

(Oxford: Basil Blackwell).

GIROUX, H. A. (1990) Curriculum Discourse as Postmodernist Critical Practice (Geelong,

Victoria: Deakin University Press).

GLASER, B. G. and STRAUSS, A. L. (1967) The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for

Qualitative Research (Chicago: Aldine).

96 r. brooker and d. macdonald

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

GORE, J. (1992) What we can do for you! what can `we’ do for `you?’?: struggling over

empowerment in critical and feminist pedagogy. In C. Luke and J. Gore (eds),

Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy (New York: Routledge), 54± 73.

GRAHAM, G. (1995a) Physical education through students’ eyes and in students’ voices:

introduction. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 364± 371.

GRAHAM, G. (1995b) Physical education through students’ eyes and in students’ voices:

implications for teachers and researchers. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education,

14 (4), 478± 482.

GRUNDY, S. (1986) Who should be involved in curriculum making? Unpublished paper

(Armidale, NSW: University of New England).

HARGREAVES, A. (1996) Revisiting voice. Educational Researcher, 25 (1), 12± 19.

HELLISON, D. R. and TEMPLIN, T. J. (1991) A Re¯ ective Approach to Teaching Physical

Education (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books).

HINKSON, J. (1992) Misreading the deeper current: the limits of economic rationality.

Arena, 98, 112± 135.

KIRK, D. and TINNING, R. (1994) Embodied self-identity, healthy lifestyles and school

physical education. Sociology of Health and Illness, 16 (5), 600± 625.

KIRK, D. andWRIGHT, J. (1995) The social construction of bodies: implications for health

and physical education curriculum. Unicorn, 21 (4), 63± 73.

KLEIN, M. F. (1989) Curriculum Reform in the Elementary School: Creating Y our Own

Agenda (New York: Teachers College Press).

MACANGHAILL,M. (1992) Student perspectives on curriculuminnovation and change in an

English secondary school: an empirical study. British Educational Research Journal, 18

(3), 221± 234.

MACDONALD,D., BROOKER,R. andHEWITT,A. (1995) Evaluation of the trial senior physical

education syllabus in Queensland secondary schools. Final report. (Brisbane,

Queensland: Board of Senior Secondary School Studies).

McRobbie, A. (1994) Postmodernism and Popular Culture (London: Routledge).

MORRISON, K. (1996) Habermas and critical pedagogy. Critical Pedagogy Networker, 9 (2),

1± 7.

ORNER, M. (1992) Interrupting the calls for student voice in `liberatory’ education: a

feminist poststructuralist perspective. In C. Luke and J. Gore (eds), Feminisms and

Critical Pedagogy (New York: Routledge), 74± 89.

PISSANOS, B. W. and ALLISON, P. C. (1993) Students’ constructs of elementary school

physical education. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 64 (4), 425± 435.

QUEENSLAND BOARD OF TEACHER REGISTRATION (1996) Teachers working with young

adolescents. Report of the Working Party on the Preparation of Teachers for the

Education of Young Adolescents (Toowong, Queensland: Queensland Board of

Teacher Registration).

ROVEGNO, I. and KIRK, D. (1995) Articulations and silences in socially critical work on

physical education: toward a broader agenda. Quest, 47 (4), 447± 474.

SMITH, P. (1989) Pedagogy andthe popular-cultural-commodity-text. InH. A. Giroux, R. I.

Simon and Contributors, Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday L ife (Granby,

MA: Bergin and Garvey), 31± 46.

TINNING, R. (1994) Baggy t-shirts, Reeboks, schooling, popular culture and young bodies.

In Deakin Centre for Education and Change, Schooling What Future? Balancing the

Education Agenda (Geelong, Victoria: DeakinCentre for Education and Change), 79±

85.

TINNING, R. and FITZCLARENCE, L. (1992) Postmodern youth culture and the crisis in

Australian secondary school physical education. Quest, 44 (3), 287± 303.

VEAL, M. L. and COMPAGNONE, N. (1995) How sixth graders perceive e. ort and skill.

Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 431± 444.

VERTINSKY, P. A. (1992) Reclaiming space, revisioning the body: the quest for gendersensitive

physical education. Quest, 44 (3), 373± 396.

WHITE,D. (1994) Curriculumreform: the big picture. In Deakin Centre for Education and

Change, Schooling What Future? Balancing the Education Agenda (Geelong, Victoria:

Deakin Centre for Education and Change), 87± 91.

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 97

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012